

The Pastor as Prophet

The Role of Spiritual Discernment in Preaching Repentance

By Jay Wegter

The prerequisite to diagnosing the spiritual state of our hearers is for us to know our own hearts. God's yielded vessel must be accomplished at ruthless honesty in his own state of affairs.

God's man invites the Lord to search his heart—he welcomes examination (Ps 26:2; 139:23-24; Heb 4:12). The Lord teaches His servant to diagnose his own heart and then preach to himself the appropriate message from the 'sword' of God's Word. The minister prepared by God has been through deep waters; "*All Thy breakers and Thy waves have rolled over me*" (Ps 42:7). By engulfing the shepherd in "breakers," God gives His man much practice in the probing of his own ways. This has net effect of increasing the preciousness of God's Word to His servant—for he has found that God, through His promises, is the lifter of his head (Is 57:15-16).

The man who truly speaks for God is subjected to a personal regimen of identifying in himself what makes his heart sickly. As C. S. Lewis said, "*I have my own heart as a reference [for understanding depravity].*" In this age of spiritual froth and foam, of more heat than light, of more smoke than fire, of more hype than holiness, we count ourselves rich to find more than a hand full of friends and brothers who wish to converse about the preciousness of Christ. There are times in our conversations in which we have to be more like Lewis Sperry Chafer who told a stranger who wished to join his dialogue concerning the deep things of God, "*No, you know nothing of the matter.*"

Out of faithfulness to biblical anthropology, it behooves us to know the human condition—to know the spiritual condition of our hearers when we preach. In our relations and in our ministry it is wisdom to pursue consistency in our doctrine of God and man. Our expectations must be in keeping with what we know of the spiritual health of our listeners, and in keeping with what God requires of them. This does not mean for a moment that it is pragmatic to limit our thinking as to what we imagine God may wish to do *eventually*. When the truth is preached, at times God invades a life dramatically. Spurgeon proclaims that there may be a Zacchaeus in your congregation who repents of his theft and covetousness in the same hour as your sermon. Yes, we are to preach always expecting God to do great things.

We cannot see the wind, but we see the trees bent over by its force. So also God's Spirit may blow among our hearers and bend them contrary to their natures. But at the same time we ought to consider that our Savior in His earthly ministry continually spoke of the heart condition of His hearers, "*You cannot hear my word*" (Jn 8:43). (See also Martin Luther's work, "The Bondage of the Will.")

C. H. Spurgeon penned one of his most famous sermons in 1855, "Free Will, a Slave." In other words, the will is bound to what a man is by nature. (See also Martin Luther's work, "The Bondage of the Will.") It was Pascal who said "*every man constantly chooses what he perceives to be in the interest of his own happiness; even the man who hangs himself.*" What a mighty work and miracle of God's grace it requires for a man's nature to be changed so that he is constrained by the love of Christ to set aside faithless self-interest and to take up his cross daily (2 Cor 5:14-17).

Because impenitent men (even outwardly religious men), do not truly fear God, they do not care when their personal word is allowed to miscarry. Personal integrity is at a low ebb in this country, even among professing believers. The old slogan, *thy word is thy bond* has fallen before the new gods of expedience, ambition, comfort, and pragmatism. We observe double-mindedness frequently in our conversations. People promise recklessly, but do not follow through—they allow their word to fall to the ground unfulfilled.

This is not right. We are created to reflect, represent, and imitate our Heavenly Father whose Word never fails. Promising is easy, keeping our promise is frequently inconvenient—but a true test of character. For the follow through necessary to keep one's word often involves sacrifice. *"It is often in the small things that we manifest holiness and the fear of God"* (John Newton). So serious a matter in God's sight is keeping one's word, that Proverbs bids us give no sleep to our eyes, until we have released ourselves from any obligation we are unable to fulfill (Prov 6:1-5). The godly man lives in the presence of God, therefore he makes sure that his word is his bond.

Ministers must know the hearts of their listeners. Apart from a miracle of God, do not expect a man who regularly 'bribes his own conscience' to allow you to inform his conscience of God's standard. Do not expect a man who has a low view of Scripture to suddenly raise his view of God's Word to the level that you maintain as God's servant. Do not bring your optimism to men, bring it to God. Men who have lived with a religious status quo for decades are not about to repent of their *respectable sins* apart from a sovereign work of the Spirit.

When dealing with a man whose pride of life manifests itself as the "power-broker" type personality, we may hear from him ostensible words of friendship. Yet on the inside, he may never let you outside of the cross-hairs of his unsanctified ambitions—he views you only as a potential 'brick' in the empire he is building. Yes, love *believes all things* (1 Cor 13:7), but love also needs to be *as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove* (Mt 10:16) because we are dealing with depraved hearts.

Don't speak to a profane man about the preciousness of the things of God. Your delight in the things of God will not stay with him any longer than the sound waves of your voice will remain in his physical ear. Those who are spiritually profane need to be called to repentance. Don't speak to a man enmeshed in lust, sin, and self-deception about the joys of obedience as if he could extricate himself in a moment and begin walking the ancient path (Jer 6:16; 18:15). Don't speak to a double-minded man (Ja 1:8) as if he were a man of principle who thinks by means of the biblical grid and whose conscience is bound by the Word of God (2 Cor 4:2; 5:11; Acts 24:16).

Shall we address churchmen who are deep in the world as if they are following Christ and hating their lives in this world (Jn 12:24-26)? For so many, religion is but a means of salving an irritating conscience—men want enough religion to feel good about themselves, but not so much of Christ that they will take up their cross in daily devotion and repentance. Our genuine brethren are those who have forsaken this world for a city *whose architect and builder is God* (Heb 11:10).

When communicating God's truth to the self-righteous, remember that you cannot help a man who thinks he has no problem, nor can you help a man who thinks you are the problem, nor can you help a man who does not believe that you are sent by God to help him. Through His Word the Lord builds, rules, preserves, and perfects His Church. Through His Word He calls back strays and crushes the

hearts of the impenitent. Through His Word He ravishes our souls, He persuades us of His goodness and love, and He conquers us and makes us willing and affectionate subjects. Therefore our task as faithful preachers and ministers in exercising the prophetic is to know the condition of the flock that we might *rightly divide the Word* in this sense: choose the passage which is fitted to their state of affairs (2 Tim 2:15). Bring the burden of the text to bear on the conscience.

The book of Proverbs is intended to cure our naiveté about men simply needing information in order to be good. The cure comes by way of a detailed explication of the self-deceptive machinations of the human heart. The book of Proverbs presents a vivid contrast between two paths; wisdom and folly. Wisdom associated with a life of self-denial and sacrificial service is work—it is a path that is contrary to our natures; men naturally prefer the path of folly (Prov 3:5-6).

In order to truly preach as a prophet, we will have to be familiar with the modus operandi of the lower nature. The Apostle Paul heard about the party spirit and pecking order that had arisen in Corinth. His converts had gravitated toward a *realized eschatology*—they wanted to live as kings in the present. Rather than humble servanthood, they had chosen ‘upsmanship’—“who is over and who is under?” They eschewed the reproach of Christ. The Apostle knew that only a steady diet of Christ and Him crucified could bring down the ‘Dagon’ they had erected in honor of fleshly wisdom.

Consider Paul’s challenge—he was dealing with fellow believers, fellow heirs who, but for his apostleship, had equal footing before God. No wonder he was in fear and trembling in their midst (1 Cor 2:3), for he had to confront their carnal wisdom without appearing proud, without exasperating them, without harming their friendship, without harshness. He would preach love, but at the same time address every abuse. He emphasized his spiritual fatherhood in their case, but what a testy congregation. They were proud, fussy, ungrateful, backbiters, sensual, and ready to betray Paul for the approval of the false apostles, yet the apostle exhorted, “be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1).

As those called of God to identify the sins of our hearers and to proclaim their need of repentance, we will have to show great discernment in how we are supported financially. Paul was very careful in the matter of receiving financial donations. Not that he couldn’t use the money, he was frequently homeless (1 Cor 4:11). The reason he was so cautious in the matter of potential donors was because he, in exercising the prophetic ministry of the Word, knew the workings of the heart of man. When Paul confronted the sin of believers, he didn’t want their financial support of him to be a possible obstacle to their repentance.

He knew the subtle reasonings that take place when people give money to men, but never really give it to the Lord (in so many cases the donor retains thoughts of obligation, superiority, and control). Thus, in knowing the human heart, Paul tended to restrict the reception of his financial support to the church at Philippi—the church of brotherly love, the church that loved Paul (Phil 4:15-18).

When Paul was imbuing his audience with urgent need of repentance, he made it a habit to not receive money from them. Repentance is hard enough work. It can be even more difficult if the preacher receives generous donations from the impenitent parties. The person who lacks repentance in his life is wedded to his lusts and, as a result, lives with a defiled conscience. Each day he procrastinates, the task of repentance grows ever more daunting and undesirable. What started as a “rock pile,” has become an Everest. The thought of “bulldozing” so much ensconced sin is withering to his spirit. He cannot

conceive of altering his life patterns and bearing the consequences of his sin—he mistakes the prospect of holiness for an enslaving harness. He fears change more than God Almighty (Jer 2:19).

Preaching repentance is not only the hammer of the Word breaking up rock, it is also the matchless hope and mercy of Christ. We preach what is known as *evangelical repentance*. In other words it is completely gospel based. In the gospel Christ is commended as a refuge so ample that His grace will support us when we abandon ourselves to Him. In true repentance there is the *free fall factor*, the penitent man casts his welfare upon the Lord, he desists from self-directed living. We always display Christ's willingness to "catch" the repentant amidst his free fall of abandonment to Christ. Our merciful High Priest is the all-sufficient support to the soul—a God-ordained 'continent of rock' beneath us. In His boundless mercy, our Lord receives returning prodigals.

Now, repentance by nature involves a very conscious transfer of reliance from created things, to the Lord Himself. This means that in true repentance there is always the repudiation of the 'leaking cisterns' of the world that we have trusted (Jer 2:13). Idolatry is always about source, always about 'returning to Egypt'. The question the penitent must answer is as follows: "Is God our true source, or have we entrusted our welfare and fulfillment to the world, to created things—and in what areas of our lives have these compromises taken place?"

The man of God, like a Navy SEAL team member, is strategically inserted by his Lord into situations that call for repentance. Now the man of God is a prophet in this sense, he makes a penetrating application of God's Word to the specific need of the sinner. As such, the man of God comes to symbolize to the impenitent man all of the rejected appointments with God that the sinner has habitually cancelled. The very appearance of the prophet Elijah caused wicked king Ahab to greet the prophet as the 'troubler of Israel'. For Ahab, Elijah's presence was a very bothersome reminder of all the king's lost opportunities to turn from personal sin in true repentance (a poignant reminder that business with God yet remains undone).

Winsome as he may be, the genuine man of God remains a disturbing irritant to the impenitent man. The very appearance of the prophet is a walking reminder to the impenitent man of the idols of heart he yet tolerates (Ez 14:3-7). Who can forget Ahab's bitter greeting addressed to the prophet Elijah, "Have you found me, oh my enemy?" (I Ki 21:20). Our Savior, and the holy prophets of old, caused discomfort by their very presence. Jesus was hated by His unbelieving hearers because He testified to men that their deeds were evil (Jn 7:7). Jesus warned His followers that if they were faithful, they too would be hated by the world (Jn 15:18-16:3) and likely by the religious establishment as well (Acts 5:40-42).

Spirit-empowered preaching produces an inevitable clash. When men are so clearly confronted with what God says about their sin, they either do the painful work of repentance, OR they discredit God's messenger. It requires a supernatural work of God for men to smash their cherished idols without a backward glance toward Sodom. Repentance is a long, humbling 'U-turn'—the penitent must retrace his steps, acknowledging at every point where he strayed from the narrow way of obedience. He must abominate the sin he tolerated, cancelling the 'peace treaties' he has been maintaining with his lusts.

Delayed repentance and compromise are always found together. God's prophets are used to snatch away what the impenitent man regards as morally neutral ground. A prophet makes the issues

black and white—he removes imagined middle ground. He shines God’s light upon compromises that have become the status quo. He obeys God when he does not hold back in declaring the sins of the people (Is 58:1ff.). The O.T. is replete with examples of confrontation by God’s prophets who bring the sin of *hesitating between two opinions* to a crisis point of repentance (1 Ki 18:21). At certain points in Israel’s history, the dividing line between obedience and disobedience became a literal line in the sand (Ex 32:26-27). After the golden calf incident, Moses stood at the gate of the camp and cried out, “*Whoever is for the Lord come to me!*” Those who didn’t were immediately slain with the sword.

In the incident of Korah’s rebellion, Aaron took his stand between the dead and the living to make atonement (Num 16:48). Allegiance to God’s Word sometimes took the visible form of the penitent individual standing beside the prophet who had spoken God’s truth.

What God occasionally did visibly in ancient times—placing the prophet between the living and the dead, He still does spiritually today. The man of God is there speaking the truth. Eternal issues are at stake. The truth from his mouth is a watershed like the continental divide. Two paths, two lifestyles, and ultimately, two destinies are at stake. There is no greater watershed than this.

Therefore, what an awesome responsibility it is to speak for God to men. God’s truth in the mouth of a prophet pulls back the calluses of the heart. This is not browbeating or moralistic preaching—it is the character of God applied to the situation of man. Men are *cut to the quick*—let us not downplay the fact that true repentance involves trauma of soul. Our calling men to repentance should also be joined to the benefits of repentance, for when our listeners repent, fruitfulness and blessing follow (Acts 3:19-20).

The impenitent man is an enigma. He opposes his own soul’s welfare. His sin has produced spiritual insanity. He ‘burns incense’ to his idols—and as a result, he studiously works to keep God at arm’s length and consequently, repentance is kept at bay. Individuals who live with impenitence secretly hope to find evidence of hypocrisy in the men of God so that our message can be discounted. As men of God, we must know how the heart of the impenitent man operates. The apostle Paul faced this kind of subtle opposition. It is an insightful, but unnerving thought that the apostle’s converts at Corinth, under the influence of the false apostles, were tempted to begin searching for hypocrisy in Paul so that they might discredit God’s messenger and postpone repentance (2 Cor 10:10). We must come to terms with this reality. The propensity of men to evade repentance has not changed since the time of the apostle Paul.

We must know what lies at the root of this tendency to cast aspersion on God’s man. So bitter is the prospect of repentance to the impenitent man that he will do anything to avoid it. This fact must strongly condition the source of our optimism. Satan holds men in a state of impenitence—a state of spiritual apathy and false comfort and security (2 Tim 2:25-26; 2 Cor 4:4). Therefore, facing what we are up against with utter realism is necessary. If we are willing to do so, it will have the conciliatory effect of driving us to hope in God’s power alone for change in our hearers. “*God’s Word is like a hammer that shatters rock*” (Jer 23:29).

We live in a culture of niceness and flattery; people wear a veneer—it is considered a ‘necessary’ part of “good manners” in our land. Our listeners may praise us with sweet words and moist eyes, but at the same time they may be planning to continue making a provision for the flesh, and

internally strengthening their reasons to remain impenitent. Recently I was discussing the problem of delayed repentance with the associate pastor of a very large church. He mentioned that at their summer men's retreat, the brothers primarily discussed "what they were struggling with." Rather than a precise course of action, and a proactive review of resources in Christ, these men primarily took 'comfort' in admitting struggles, instead of undergoing deep repentance. They made a show of fighting sin, but had little real progress in holiness.

One of the most shocking examples of a spiritual veneer is found in the book of Jeremiah. The prophet's entourage of Jewish expatriates cast their request in the most spiritual language possible. "*Jeremiah, pray for us to find God's will—we will do whatever the Lord says to do*" (Jer 42:2-6).

Ten days later the Lord answers Jeremiah. God reveals to the prophet their entrenched idolatry and their wicked plan to return to Egypt. When Jeremiah verbally uncovers their motives, the people turn upon him like vicious animals. They accuse him of lying to them. The resultant exchange ends with the apostate people uttering a blasphemous attack upon God's Word, "*we will carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths*" (Jer 44:17).

It's amazing that the people made the decision to approach Jeremiah in the first place, asking him to pray for God's will and pledging their commitment to obey the direction God would give through him. During the 10 days of waiting on the Lord, God revealed to Jeremiah the contents of the peoples' hearts. The outwardly spiritual congregation wanted to assuage their guilty consciences by involving God's man in their plans! They wound up dragging Jeremiah along with them to the place God had forbidden them to go—to Egypt. Concerning the heart of man, nothing has changed in 2700 years. Those who are both religious and impenitent still want to entangle God's prophet (God's man) in their carnal endeavors in order to "Christianize" their worldly ambitions.

How devastating it has been for many ministers to come to the realization that people under his care have regarded him merely as a "spiritual mascot"—he was just along for the ride in order to palliate their consciences—like a 'cardboard chaplain' on a gambling cruise ship. When apostate Christianity is in league with the love of mammon and the values of economic Babylon, the pastor may have little more influence than a chaplain on a cruise ship for partiers. His presence may even assist men in bribing consciences, while the moral direction of the ship remains unchanged.

Nothing tests a man's ministry like the offer of honor, security, notoriety, popularity, outward success, and financial resources. How true it is, the fear of man keeps many men from warning the flock. Honor and money are at stake. Jesus cast this dynamic as an inverse proportion: *the more a man wants glory from men; the less he will live for the glory God*. So serious is this matter that Jesus told those hungry for the glory of men that they *could not believe God* (Jn 5:44). Pastor John O. Anderson who has spoken in the parliaments of five western countries in defense of the unborn said the following: "*At times the only thing that separates a false prophet from a true prophet is that the false prophet refuses to warn.*" (See John O. Anderson's book defending life in the womb, "Cry of the Innocents, and the Race toward Judgment.")

When honor, recognition, power, and money are lavished upon a man of God it carries with it the potential of a corrupting, compromising influence. Frequently those in a position to lavish the money and honor are in the habit of looking to that duo for their own sense of value and completeness. Is it any wonder that their bestowal can be a tacit invitation to enter a temporal value system?

“Love believes all things,” but that biblical statement is not giving a warrant to be gullible. It means rather, that the believer is not to be suspicious, or too quick to divine someone’s motives. If however sin is clearly evident, the believer must judge it and support its correction and discipline (“First Corinthians,” *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 1252). The book of Proverbs addresses the gullibility that is inherent in us. In a nearly comical use of hyperbole, the verse states that if we are given to appetite we should rather *“put a knife to our throat”* than eagerly eat the delicacies offered by a wealthy ruler (Prov 23:2). Why? Because, the food and the compliments belie the fact that the man wants something from us—by his gifts, he intends to obligate his guest.

So also the man of God is tested by the promises of his hearers to make him comfortable and popular in this life. Out of a love for the truth, Paul was hypersensitive in these matters of collecting resources for ministers. He was careful about receiving financial support from the Corinthians. He wished to avoid any spurious charges coming from the false apostles that he preached for mercenary reasons; therefore it was Paul’s aim to preach the Gospel without pay. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:12, *“If others share the right over you [of financial support], do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”* Paul was able to do what most of us are simply unable to do because of the cost of living we face. He was able to be incredibly selective about his financial support.

God’s pastoral prophet may be frequently tested in this very issue; the issue of resources offered to him by his listeners. Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 9 that the minister has the right to live by his preaching of the Gospel. But in our study of the human heart, we need to know how our supporters are tempted to think. Money is commonly given with strings attached. Why you ask? Because it requires an act of faith and love for the believer to give to God’s workers as unto the Lord with no strings attached.

How strong in Christ the man of God must be, for the praise and resources of men call out to him to enter an unspoken contract. And what are the terms of the unspoken contract? Very simply they are: *we will make you comfortable if you make us comfortable. Do not disturb our lifestyles. Do not upset us. We have hired you. You belong to us. You are our paid teacher, our employee. We will be charitable toward you if you pronounce us spiritually well. Remember, we are the ones evaluating you.* There is no cynicism here. Every prophet of God of every age faced the same offer of the unspoken contract. Every prophet had to decide if the Word of God was to be bound or loosed in his ministry (2 Tim 2:9). Every prophet had to come to terms with a loss of popularity if he preached the whole counsel of God. Each man in ministry who gains a hearing will have to decide what his stance will be in terms of receiving human recognition. Few areas hold greater potential for self-deception. Recognition is addicting—it can be mainlined like heroin.

The man of God stands between two worlds. He stands between God and man. Both exert pressure upon him. If a man says that he doesn’t feel this pressure, he may have already sold his soul. Feeling the pressure is necessary if the man of God is to be able to say at the end of his ministry, *“I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God”* (Acts 20:27, 28).

Every prophet of God must walk so closely with his Lord that he does not fear being in the minority (for at times he may be a minority of one). Under the reign of King Ahab, the prophet Micaiah

was beckoned to give his prophecy to a packed house. Ahab and Jehoshaphat were there; the un-anointed prophets were there as well. Micaiah was “primed” ahead of time by the king’s messenger, “*make certain that your prophecy is favorable just as the prophecy of the other prophets will be*” (1 Ki 22:13).

Micaiah was the lone voice of truth. He was threatened with incarceration for speaking the Word of God. The false prophets questioned his spirituality. He did not back down. Speaking the truth can be provocative. It may stir up a hornets’ nest in an instant. In our faithfulness, shall we expect a life of honor when our Lord was so often reproached? In Luke 4 the synagogue congregation was filled with wonder at the gracious words which were falling from the lips of Jesus (4:22). Our Lord chose not to ride that wave of popularity. Instead He spoke truth which He knew would be inflammatory. The adoring crowd turned on Him in an instant like a pack of blood-thirsty predators.

Yet, as the promised Prophet, Christ was willing to be provocative. By stating that God had cared for a Gentile widow and a Gentile leper at the time of Israel’s apostasy, Jesus effectively turned 700 years of historical revisionism on its ear. The response of the congregation to a proper interpretation of Israel’s history was murderous rage. Their generational corporate pride ran deep. Jesus had dared to touch the sacred nerve of national Jewish privilege. Today’s prophet will be daring (at God’s command) as well to speak truth that he knows has the potential to provoke.

There are key chapters in Scripture which describe for us the startling contrast between a shepherd and a hireling (Jn 10 and Ez 34 especially). The hireling tailors his message to the tastes of his hearers. The more they pay him, the more he flatters them. “*Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead My people astray; when they have something to bite with their teeth, they cry “Peace,” but against him who puts nothing in their mouths, they declare holy war*” (Mi 3:5).

There are two O.T. individuals that stand out in bold relief as “prophets for hire” – the Levite of Judges 17-18, and Balaam. The Scripture holds them up as negative examples, as object lessons. One with some N.T. commentary (Balaam’s career mentioned in Jude 11 and 2 Peter 2:12), and one with no N.T. commentary (the Levite for hire). I site them in this article because there are insights to be gained by studying those who “employed” their services. The prophets themselves are so egregious in their behavior, and so clearly hirelings in character that the lessons from their failures are ineluctable—they are not to be missed.

The Levite who was hired to superintend the worship of a household idol received a substantial pay raise when he was stolen by a band of raiders who offered him the role of “chaplain” to their band of 600 (Judges 17-18). The Scripture says of the Levite (upon receiving his “promotion”), “*And the priest’s heart was glad, and he took the ephod and household idols and the graven image, and went among the people*” (Judges 18:20). He was not the first to sell his soul for a promotion.

The tragedy of the Levite’s compromise is captured in the final verse of the chapter, “*So they set up for themselves Micah’s graven image which he had made, all the time that the house of God was at Shiloh*” (Judges 18:31). So fully did the Levite become the puppet of this murderous band that the priest’s actions proved to be the catalyst that established regional idolatry in the city of Dan.

Balaam is the most well-known prophet for hire in the Bible. 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation all refer to him as teaching wickedness for pay. His negative example is so vivid and hideous that it’s unlikely that we see much relevance in his account to the kinds of temptations that assault us.

King Balak somehow knew in his heart that the prophet Balaam was corruptible. His pleas to allow Balaam to be enriched by him finally prevailed. Yet, Balaam’s initial testimony to King Balak is at

first impressive, “*Whatever the Lord speaks, that I must do*” (Num 23:26). The king’s offer of wealth and honor lodged in Balaam’s heart like a serpent’s egg ready to hatch. Once it hatched, Balaam ran with the same madness that was at first restrained by the “obstinate” talking donkey. The second time God did not restrain the prophet. The prophet, mad for his reward, ran to King Balak and sold him a wicked plan that would make Israel stumble. We marvel that the holy prophecies that passed through Balaam’s mind and lips were not believed by the very prophet who spoke them. Scripture says that Balaam “*loved the wages of unrighteousness*” (2 Pet 2:15).

Sometimes the cost of standing between the dead and the living is to take no reward. Our Lord is the highest example of this kind of sacrifice. Christ Jesus indirectly warns his disciples that fidelity to Him may put us in situations where foxes and birds may have better accommodations than we do (Luke 9:58). Christ told His own that the world loves its own, but you are not of the world. To declare to men their sins is to be labeled an annoyance, a meddler, even a busybody. The man of God must know the origin of these charges, or he will never be willing to receive such a stigma for preaching holiness and the requirements of God upon His creatures. Courage is involved in preaching repentance as it should be preached: “*I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord—and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act*” (Mic 3:8).

Repentance is like defying gravity. Nature opposes every effort. True repentance is always a miracle—it is Holy Spirit induced and enabled—through the agency of God’s Word in the mouth of the prophet. The mind of man raises a thousand arguments to delay repentance yet again. The prophet cannot afford to have anything in his manner of life even one of those thousand reasons not to repent. He must be like a surgeon whose hands are perfectly clean before he makes the incision. So much is at stake; for repentance is the business of readiness for heaven.

Countless pastors today in Evangelicalism have never broken the ‘unspoken contract’ with their parishioners. By ‘unspoken contract’ we mean that the fallen nature of man wants to view God’s servant as a hireling (someone they have employed) and not a man speaking on God’s behalf. The unspoken contract goes something like this: “Pastor, if you preach so that it is implied that we are spiritually sound—and the sins that really offend God are outside our church, then we will underwrite your ministry, uphold your reputation, and help you build your empire.”

God’s man is always breaking this unspoken contract. Therefore he is ‘preacher as prophet’ because he does not fear making a penetrating application of God’s Word to his hearers. The prophetic in this sense means he never becomes entangled in any agenda which would cause the Word of God to be bound, softened or compromised. He carefully eschews any obligation which would dilute the proclamation of the Word from his lips. He is careful to draw his sermons only from what God has worked in his own life through the Scriptures.